

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

- 1 1. A modular electronic communications system comprising:
 - 2 a base unit,
 - 3 a connection from said base unit to at least one external communications device,
 - 4 at least one module comprising at least one additional communications feature,
 - 5 said module capable of being coupled directly to said base unit, said module further
 - 6 comprising a data combining function for combining information from said base unit and
 - 7 said module.
- 1 2. The electronic communications system of claim 1, wherein said base unit does
- 2 not comprise a data combining function and wherein said base unit comprises a switch
- 3 for routing data to said combining function located in said module.
- 1 3. The electronic communications system of claim 1, wherein said base unit
- 2 comprises a data combining function.
- 1 4. The electronic communications system of claim 1, wherein said module is
- 2 capable of operating independently of said base unit.

1 5. The electronic communications system of claim 1, further comprising a second
2 module coupled directly to said first module.

1 6. The electronic communications system of claim 5, wherein said second module is
2 capable of operating independently of said base unit.

1 7. The electronic communications system of claim 3, wherein said second module
2 further comprises a data combining function.

1 8. The electronic communications system of claim 3, wherein the said second
2 module does not comprise a data combining function.

1 9. A modular electronic communications system comprising:
2 a base unit comprising at least a first communication function,
3 a connection from said base unit to at least one external communications device,
4 at least one module comprising at least a second communications function, said
5 module being coupled directly to said base unit,
6 a data combining function, located in said module, for combining data from at
7 least three data sources, said data sources comprising said second communication
8 function, said first communication function, and said external communications device,
9 a switch located in said base unit for switching said connection of said external
10 communications device between said combining function located in said module, and
11 said first communication function.

1 10. The modular electronic communications system of claim 9, further comprising a
2 second module.

1 11. The modular electronic communications system of claim 9, further comprising a
2 second module positioned remotely from said base unit.

1 12. The modular electronic communications system of claim 10, wherein said second
2 module is coupled to said base unit base unit.

1 13. The modular electronic communications system of claim 10, wherein the said
2 second module further comprises a data combining function.

1 14. The modular electronic communications system of claim 10, wherein the said
2 second module does not comprise a data combining function.

1 15. The modular electronic communications system of claim 9, wherein said base
2 unit does not comprise a data combining function.

1 16. A method for adding additional network functions into a network system while
2 keeping the existing physical wiring connections to an external communications device,
3 the method comprising the steps of:

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5 (a) obtaining a base unit;

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7 (b) installing said base unit and connecting an external communications

8 device to said base unit;

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10 (c) obtaining one or more additional data communications functions

11 contained in a first module; and

12

13 (d) coupling said first module directly to said base unit while keeping the

14 existing physical wiring connections to said external communication device in

15 step (b).

1 17. The method of claim 16 further comprising the step of: (e) obtaining one or more
2 additional data communications functions contained in a second module.

1 18. The method of claim 17 further comprising the step of: (f) coupling said second
2 module to said base unit while keeping the existing physical wiring connections to said
3 communication device in step (b).

1 19. The method of claim 17 further comprising the step of: (g) coupling said second
2 module to said first module while keeping the existing physical wiring connections to
3 said communication device in step (b).

1 20. The method of claim 17 further comprising the step of: (h) coupling a cable
2 between said second module and said base unit.